



THE NAVAJO NATION

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## PUBLIC HEARINGS PUSH VETERAN CONCERNS AND APPROVAL OF VETERANS ACT

NAVAJO NATION-Since November 2015, the Office of the President and Vice President (OPVP) has initiated a rigorous schedule in presenting the Veterans Act throughout communities across the Navajo Nation. Navajo veterans had voiced the passing of this act as their top issue when the administration was elected into office.

On Thursday, Jan. 7, OPVP held the seventh public hearing regarding the Veterans Act at the Navajo Department of Transportation just east of Tse Bonito, N.M. The intent of the hearing was to present the Veterans Act to Navajo veterans for comment and recommendation.

“It’s a fluid document that is always evolving with the input of the veterans,” said OPVP Executive Assistant and Veterans Liaison Jamescita Peshlakai, “We are open to their comments and are making ourselves accessible to their voices.”

In brief summary, the Veterans Act is trying to establish an elevated office to better assist veterans in accessing federal and state services and benefits. The public hearings are providing veterans the opportunity to assist in creating the office so that it’s most beneficial to them. OPVP recognizes that the veterans know their needs best.

The Veterans Act is legislation that has been in the process of assessment, evaluation and revision for approximately four decades. The Begaye-Nez Administration isn’t the first administration to try and get the act passed through the Navajo Nation Council.

“It’s been defeated in almost every administration,” said Vice President Jonathan Nez. “The window of opportunity is closing fast for this act to go through. If it dies in this administration, the efforts to have it approved might not happen again. We are urging veterans to contact their council delegates immediately.”

Presenting the draft legislation to Navajo veterans with the intent of having it passed and enacted is a top priority for the Begaye-Nez Administration.

President Begaye attended and spoke at the public hearing on Jan. 7, addressing how important veteran participation is in the development and passing of the act. The president reaffirmed that his administration is fully committed to helping Navajo Veterans.

“We are committed to serving our people who sacrificed so much in protecting our freedom, as we know freedom is not free. We will do everything we can to make sure our veterans have a place to live and receive adequate health services. This act will make this a reality but we will have to continue to work hard to overcome barriers that our veterans have to deal with every day.”

Thus far there have been seven public hearings held across the Navajo Nation in places like Chinle, Tuba City, Nenahnezad and Crownpoint to name a few. The public hearings and presentations were all conducted in Navajo and English. Information on the events have been distributed to media outlets and veterans organizations.

During these initial hearings, veterans and attendees asked for a follow-up hearing to ensure that their recommendations were incorporated into the revised document that is the Veterans Act.

As a result of this continued collaboration a second follow-up public hearing has been set for Monday, Jan. 11th at the Gallup New Mexico University campus, Student Services and Technology Building, Conference room from 10 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Before the Veterans Act was submitted for legislation it was redrafted to include concerns and suggested recommendations from veterans. Because of this, the new draft will be the subject of Monday's public hearing at UNM Gallup.

Documents related to each hearing are available online at the Navajo Department of Veterans Affairs website at: <http://www.dnva.navajo-nsn.gov>

The Veterans Act legislation, sponsored by Honorable Council Delegate Jonathan Hale, was signed on Thursday, Dec. 7, by Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lorenzo Bates. It was assigned Tracking Number: 0006-16 and is posted on the Navajo Nation Councils website at: <http://www.navajonationcouncil.org/legislation.html>.

From here the legislation will go forward to the Navajo Nation Law and Order Committee, Health, Education and Human Services Committee, and the Naabik'yati Committee. OPVP urges all veterans and interested individuals to follow meeting schedules on the Navajo Nation Council website and submit all comments to [comments@navajo-nsn.gov](mailto:comments@navajo-nsn.gov).

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